

Message Text

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12

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 NEA-10 IO-14 DRC-01 /146 W

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R 161801Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6120

INFO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 1385

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, US

SUBJECT: MASMOUDI, BOURGUIBA AND THE AMERICANS

1. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF JEUNE AFRIQUE, BECHIR BEN YAHMED, TOLD EMBOFF OVER LUNCH THE FOLLOWING STORY WHICH, HE SAID, IS WIDELY BELIEVED IN TUNISIAN POLITICAL CIRCLES. ACCORDING TO BEN YAHMED, WELL BEFORE THE DJERBA DECLARATION OF THE TUNISIAN-LIBYAN UNION, MASMOUDI DISCUSSED WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA THE RUMOR THEN CURRENT IN TUNIS THAT THE AMERICANS WERE DISSATISFIED WITH MASMOUDI AND THAT HE WOULD NOT BE WELCOME DURING THE PREISDENT'S PROJECTED VISIT TO WASHINGTON. BOURGUIBA, WHO, DESPITE MASMOUDI'S ASSERATIONS OF HIS CONTINUED GOOD RELATIONS, WAS NONETHELESS CONCERNED ABOUT MASMOUDI'S ACCEPTABILITY TO THE US, SUGGESTED THAT A STATEMENT FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER EXPRESSING CONFIDENCE IN MASMOUDI WOULD BE HELPFUL.

2. MASMOUDI IS SAID TO HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY APPROACHED THE AMERICAN AMABSSADOR WHO CONTINUED BEN YAHMED, REASSURED HIM ABOUT HIS STILL BEING PERSONNA GRATA AND AGREED TO TRY TO SECURE THE SECRETARYS ENDORSEMENT. BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR DJERBA, BOURGUIBA SET UP AN APPOINTMENT FOR JANUARY 14 WITH THE AMBASSADOR DURING WHICH THE LATTER WAS EXPECTED TO CONVEY THE SECRETARYS ENDORSEMENT OF MASMOUDI. AFTER THE MERGER ANNOUNCEMENT, THE APPOINTMENT WAS CHANGED BY THE TUNISIANS AND, IN
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LIGHT OF MASMOUDIS SUBSEQUENT DISMISSAL, BOURGUIBAS REASON FOR GRANTING THE AUDIENCE MAY ALSO HAVE CHANGED. BEN YAHMED

ADDED THAT THE FRENCH AMBASSADORS MEETING WITH BOURGUIBA
WAS NOT ARRANGED UNTIL AFTER THE UNION ANNOUNCEMENT.

3. COMMENT: WHATEVER THE TRUTH OF THE STORY OR WHATEVER
THE IMPLICATIONS ONE MAY BE EXPECTED TO DRAW FROM IT, BEN
YAHMED SEEMED TO CONSIDER IT ACCURATE AND MAY WELL RUN IT IN
JEUNE AFRIQUE. HE APPEARED SATISFIED THAT THE US, IN FACT, HAS
NO SPECIAL AX TO GRIND WITH MASMOUDI.
STONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, CHIEF OF STATE VISITS, REMOVAL FROM OFFICE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 JAN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: kelleyw0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974PARIS01385
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740138/aaaabjlj.tel
Line Count: 70
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: kelleyw0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <30-Sep-2002 by kelleyw0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MASMOUDI, BOURGUIBA AND THE AMERICANS
TAGS: PFOR, TS, US, (MASMOUDI, MOHAMED)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005